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Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council deeply concerned that conflict in Afghanistan could destablilize region; calls for an end to fighting and lifting of blockade around Kabul.

- Security Council welcomes decision in Sierra Leone to maintain 26 February as date for national elections.

- Secretary-General notes growing importance of regionalism in international affairs; says United Nations alone cannot deal with all threats to international peace and security.

- Secretary-General recommends mandate of UNMIH be extended for further six months at substantially reduced strength.

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The Security Council today deeply deplored the continued fighting which had brought death and destruction to Afghanistan and threatened peace and security in the region. The Council President, Madeleine Albright (United States), read a statement expressing particular concern at intensified shelling and air attacks in and around the Afghan capital of Kabul and the blockade which had prevented the delivery of food, fuel and other humanitarian supplies to the city. The Council called on the parties to end hostilities and immediately lift the blockade. It commended efforts by the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, and the airlift of food from Peshawar, Pakistan, to Kabul and urged the international community to continue supporting those life-saving efforts.

The Council expressed deep concern that the conflict was a fertile ground for terrorism, illicit arms transfers and drug trafficking which destabilize the whole region and beyond. It called on the leaders of the Afghan parties to put aside their differences and halt such activities. The Council also called on all Afghans to cooperate with efforts by the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan to find a peaceful solution through the establishment of a representative, broad-based, authoritative council acceptable to all Afghans. States, in a position to do so, were urged to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, cooperate with the United Nations Mission and refrain from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The Council called on all States to prevent the flow of weapons and other supplies

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that could fuel the fighting. It urged the captors of the crew of the Russian aircraft in Kandahar to release them immediately without preconditions.

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In another action today, the Security Council welcomed the overwhelming support by Sierra Leone's National Consultative Conference for the decision to maintain 26 February as the date for national elections. It also welcomed the Government's renewed promise, through the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council, to hold the elections as scheduled and noted his confirmation that necessary technical arrangements for the elections were in place. The Council reiterated that holding free and fair elections, as scheduled, was critically important to the country's transition to democratic constitutional rule.

Any delay or interruption in the electoral process was likely to erode donor support and greatly increase the potential for further instability and violence with devastating consequences for Sierra Leone's people, the Council stated. It cautioned groups and individuals not to disrupt through violence or intimidation the elections which the great majority of people supported. It called on the Government to fulfil its undertaking to ensure a safe and free electoral environment. The Council urged all parties to end the violence and welcomed initial contacts between the Government and the Revolutionary United Front. It called on the Front to renew its cease-fire and enter into a full peace dialogue without any conditions.

The Council expressed continued concern about the humanitarian situation and suffering as a result of the conflict and called on member States to continue to provide humanitarian assistance. It commended the Secretary-General's efforts to assist the elections, particularly the establishment of the Joint International Observer Group. It also commended the work of his Special Envoy to support the democratic transition and to facilitate peace negotiations between the Government and the Front. The Council asked the Secretary-General to monitor the situation and to keep it informed of all significant developments.

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Regional Organizations were becoming increasingly important as a force in international affairs, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Addressing the opening of the second meeting today between the United Nations and regional organizations, he said the United Nations, by itself, could not possible deal with all the threats to international peace and security. It had been given vast responsibilities, but not the political, military, material and financial resources to accomplish its objectives. The severe financial crisis would affect the UN's ability to undertake new tasks and some activities and missions might be phased out. A division of labour

between the UN and regional organizations -- or delegation from the UN to those organizations -- had become urgent.

There was also an imbalance in the way tasks were assigned to the UN and regional organizations, the Secretary-General said. In Bosnia, a small and lightly armed UN force had been sent as peace-keepers into a continuing war. Now, paradoxically, a massive and well armed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) combat force had been sent to monitor the peace. The concepts were upside down. One solution to the imbalance in resources would be greater inter-organizational cooperation.

The Secretary-General said the international community must be careful in assigning tasks and allocating resources. The potential or actual conflict must be ripe for international treatment and respond well to it. Appropriate methods included good offices, mediation, arbitration, peace-keeping, sanctions and military enforcement. The comparative advantages and disadvantages of organizations should be carefully weighed and certain questions addressed. Would the UN or a regional organization be more acceptable to the parties? Would the impartiality of a regional organization be questioned because of its members' own national interests?

A universal model for cooperation between the UN and regional organizations was not feasible, he continued. A pragmatic and flexible approach, which took into account the types of cooperation and organizations involved, had a better chance of success. Preventive and post-conflict peace-building was likely to be an important area of cooperation. In Bosnia, the UN was cooperating very closely with several regional organizations, including NATO and the European Union to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement.

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The Secretary-General has recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) be extended for a further six months until 29 August. In a report to the Security Council dated 14 February, he also recommended that the mission's numbers be substantially reduced to approximately 2,000 personnel from its current strength of just over 4,500. The Secretary-General said he proposed the reduction in numbers partly because some of the Mission's responsibilities had been transferred to new institutions which it had helped establish in Haiti and partly because of the United Nations financial crisis.

The Secretary-General said the Haitian people had started on the long road towards a peaceful and democratic society. But they and their leaders knew that although they could be proud of their achievements during the short period since the restoration of constitutional government, they still faced formidable challenges. It was essential that the continued commitment he was asking the international community to make towards Haiti, at a time of acute

financial crisis in the United Nations, be matched with a renewed commitment by the Haitian people, their political and civilian leaders and their Government. The opportunity was unique in Haiti's long and turbulent history and could not be missed without grave consequences, he said.

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